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Who Was Mathias Bernard Pederson?

Elisabeth Thorsell*

Last spring Ambassador Eva Kettis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested assistance from the Genealogy Society in finding the roots of a woman in Anchorage, Alaska. The woman in question, *Teresa J. Pederson-Szafran*, was contacted by e-mail and we eventually gathered the following information regarding her father's father.

Mathias Bernard Pederson, as he was called in America, was born 24 February 1878 in Värmland. He lost his parents when he was about nine years old and moved with his only brother to South Dakota, where they lived close to a Sioux reservation. Here, Mathias learned to speak the Sioux language.

Mathias eventually enlisted in the Army and served in the Spanish-American War in 1898. When the war ended in August 1898, he returned to the U.S., spent a few months in Minneapolis, and later left for California. He worked as a lumberjack in the redwood forests and also survived the big earthquake in 1906 before continuing to Alaska.

In Alaska he lived in Flat, Iditarod, and Ruby, and supported himself by providing wood to the steamboats on the Yukon River. But the gold intrigued him and he continued on to Nome, where he began to pan for gold. He settled in Council, another well-known mining area, where he met his future wife, married, and had a family.

His wife, Emily Pockpahlook, was from an Eskimo family. Mathias and Emily had three children, all born in Council: Steve (b. 13 July 1918), Emma (b. 14 June 1921), and Betsy (b. 18 December 1923). Mathias died in Seattle, Washington, in 1958 and was buried in Washelli Military Cemetery in Seattle.

In the mid-1900s, gold prices decreased and people left Council and Nome in large numbers. Steve Pederson stayed and married Kitty Jackson of the Eskimo family Inupiat, from Kiana, Alaska. Today, their son Mathias B. Pederson manages the family's gold mining business.

Steve's daughter Teresa has studied at the University of Washington and at the United Nation's Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and has worked with nuclear disarmament in the Arctic. Teresa lives in Anchorage with her husband Edward Szafran and daughters Quenna and Chandre.

Teresa would appreciate it very much if someone could give tips regarding her father's father's birthplace and whether she has any relatives in Sweden. She does not know the name of the brother in South Dakota, but believes Mathias's mother's name was Emma.

If you have a tip, contact *Släkthistoriskt Forum*.

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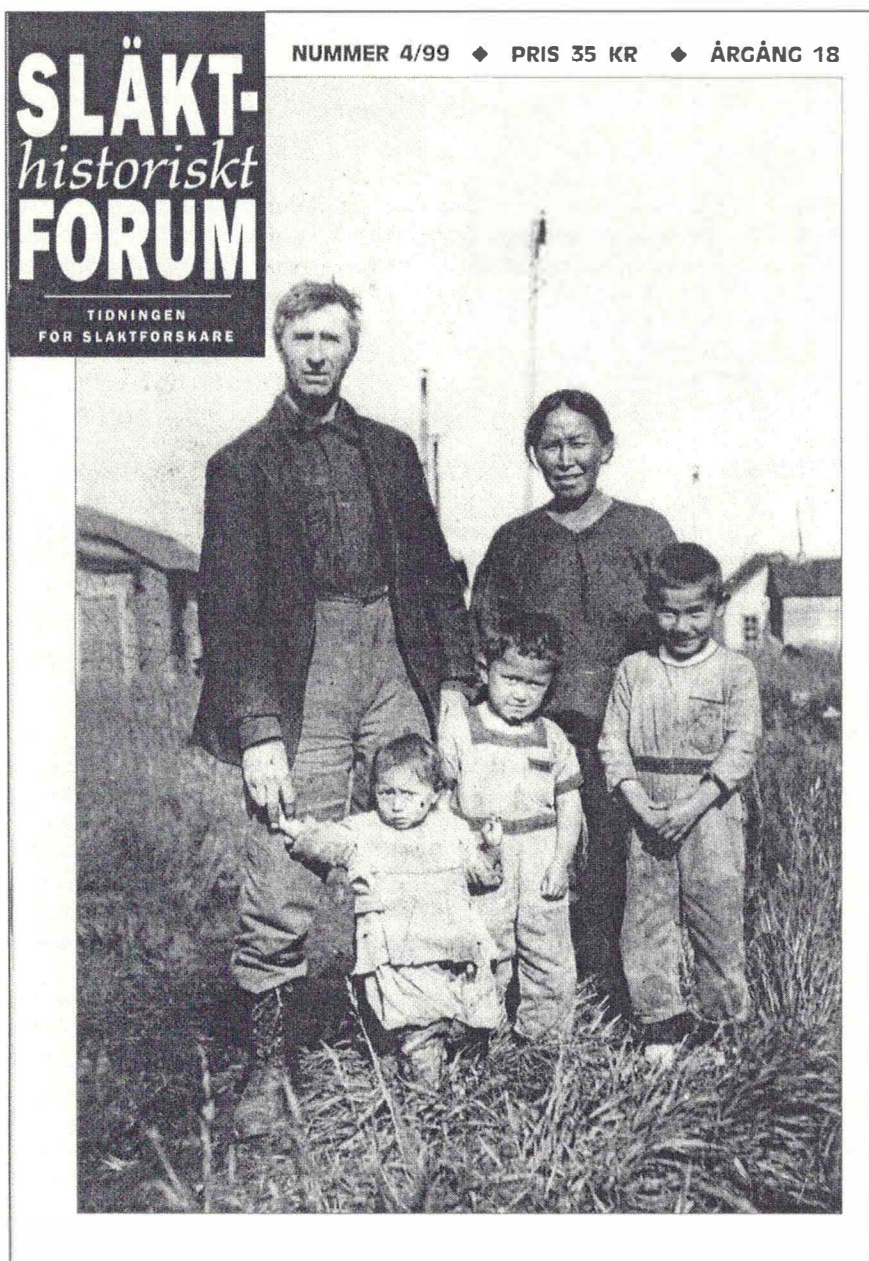


Fig. 1. Photograph of Mathias Bernard Pederson with his family in Alaska as it appeared on the cover of *Släkt-historiskt Forum*, 4/99.